

Now we have come to the central section of the book of Joshua.

Taking Possession of the land (the last two sections will be “dividing the land” and “worshiping God.”)

God had promised this land to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob –
that their heirs – their descendants – would take possession of the land of Canaan.

And so the leading verb in this section of the book – not surprisingly –
is the verb to take possession!

And now that the army has been cleansed.

Now that the army has been nourished by word and sacrament,
as Joshua...

Introduction: Worship and Warfare (5:13-15)

¹³ When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”

This is a great example of Joshua’s courage.

He sees a man with a drawn sword.

He does not run off and call for help –

neither does he brashly rush to fight this stranger!

Rather he asks,

“Are you for us, or for our adversaries.”

And the reply is important:

¹⁴ And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.”

Whose side are you on?

No, Joshua, you don’t understand!

Whose side are *you on?!?*

God does not take sides!

I am the commander of the army of the LORD.

You, Joshua, are my servant.

Yes, you will cause Israel to inherit the land –

but only if you humble yourself and listen to my voice!

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped^[c] and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?”¹⁵ And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

This is where spiritual warfare begins:
on your face before God!

Sometimes we get really busy with all the “doing of stuff.”
And doing stuff *is* important!
But when our doing of stuff gets in the way of falling flat on our faces before God,
we need to reconsider where our hearts are focused!

Only when we are prostrate before the commander of the LORD's army
will we be able to hear his marching orders and do what he actually *wants us to do!*

In verses 1-5 we have the command of the LORD.
Then in verses 6-21, we have the fulfillment of that command –
and then in verses 21-27 we have the outcome,
for the people of Jericho, for Rahab, for the city of Jericho,
and for Joshua himself.

The siege of Jericho is described in verse 1:

1. The Command of the LORD (v1-5)

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

Jericho is one of the oldest fortified cities in the ancient Near East.

It is also the lowest city on the planet –
being 750 feet below sea level –
not far from the Dead Sea.

At the time of the Battle of Jericho, the inner walls of the city of Jericho
had stood for over a thousand years!

Jericho was one of the great ancient cities of the region!
Taking pride in their impregnable walls –
they didn't bother calling for help from other cities!

They see the small Israelite army –
and in those days, no one had great siege weapons –
so Jericho doesn't have much to fear –

unless the LORD does something...

² *And the LORD said to Joshua,*

Notice how the “commander of the army of the LORD”
is now called “the LORD” himself!

And the LORD says to Joshua:

“See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.

Here’s the plan:

³ *You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat,^[a] and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.”*

God has told Joshua – here is how to win the battle.

In future battles Israel will be expected to fight.

But they need to learn first that the battle belongs to the LORD.

God is the one who saves his people!

He is the one who will give them the land.

It connects rather well with our situation today!

Our Joshua has won the battle of Jericho.

We are continuing to fight our spiritual war day by day.

But we always fight with the Battle of Jericho at heart.

Of course, the battle of Jericho was a small matter
compared to the cross of Christ!

But the picture is the same:

only God can save!

only *he* can defeat his and our enemies and bring us into the land!

But faith believes God – and then *does* what God says.

Watch how Joshua does this – in verse 6:

2. “Just as Joshua Commanded the People” (v6-21)

a. Six Days of Marching Once (v6-14)

⁶ *So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD.” ⁷ And he*

said to the people, “Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD.”

Notice how the ark of the LORD is at the center of the story.

The priests take up their rams horns – the ark of the covenant is marched around the city.

Remember the Jordan River!

At the Jordan River, as soon as the feet of the priests who carried
the ark of the covenant touched the water,
the waters parted.

Just like the glory of the LORD led Israel through the Red Sea –
and then the glory of the LORD filled the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle –
so now the glory of the LORD leads Israel into battle!

But the glory of the LORD has come to dwell in their midst.

There is all the difference in the world between sacramental thinking
and magical thinking.

Sacramental thinking is when you see the connection between the earthly thing
and the heavenly thing.

Sacramental thinking is always driven by *faith*.

By faith we see the connection between the ark of the covenant
and the presence of God –
and so we believe God and walk forward!

Magical thinking has no need for faith!

Magical thinking says “hey, we got that powerful thing – let’s use it!”

Sometimes Israel will fall into magical thinking.

They will think that if only we bring the ark of the covenant into battle –
then we will win the battle!!

In the book of Samuel that will lead to the death of the priests –
and the ark being captured by the Philistines!

God is teaching his people that he is not swayed by magical thinking!

He wants them to develop sacramental thinking!

Do you see the connection between the ark of the covenant and my presence with you?
Then believe me – trust me – and do what I say!

March around the city once in silence!

⁸ And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. ⁹ The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.

¹⁰ But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout."

¹¹ So he caused the ark of the LORD to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp.

Magical thinking would say,

"hey, we got the ark – that means God is with us – so let's charge the city gate!"

Sacramental thinking responds,

"No, God has told us what to do.

He is present with us.

So let us trust him, believe his promises, and do what he says!"

And so by faith the people march silently around the city.

¹² Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. ¹³ And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁴ And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

And they do this for six days.

It is worth considering the effect of this on the people of Jericho:

What are they doing?

Marching around the city.

Why are they so quiet?

I don't know – it's kinda bizarre!

They've been doing this every day!

Until the seventh day...

b. The Seventh Day of Marching Seven Times (v15-21)

¹⁵ On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day,

The text does not say which day of the week this started on –

but it is worth noting that they do not take a day off for the Sabbath!

And it is most likely that the seventh day of marching *is* the Sabbath!

Which would mean that the day of battle is the Sabbath Day.
This is a reminder to us that the Bible does not teach a Pharisaic view of the Sabbath!
The Pharisees would say that marching around Jericho
is a violation of the Sabbath!
So whether it was day 1, 3, or 7 – no matter how many times you marched! –
marching is a violation of the Sabbath!

Jesus regularly refutes the Pharisaic view of the Sabbath.
That doesn't mean that Jesus abolishes the Sabbath!
It means that Jesus rejects the Pharisaic interpretation of the Sabbath!
He agrees entirely with the Mosaic view of the Sabbath –
or, you might say, Joshua's view of the Sabbath!

Marching around Jericho is a perfectly good thing to do on the Sabbath!
You are with God's people – doing God's work –
in the presence of God himself (through the ark of the covenant).
What could be better?!

Our text is suggesting that Joshua spent the seventh day – the Sabbath day –
conquering Jericho.

Think about what Joshua's namesake did on the Sabbath day?!
It was the evening of the sixth day that he died.
He spent that last Sabbath – that final Seventh day –
doing battle against the gates of hell!

(Remember what I said about the ark of the covenant being captured in the book of Samuel?
What happened when the ark was captured?
The ark was taken to the temple of Dagon – one of the gods of the Philistines.
The ark of the covenant – the presence of Yahweh with his people –
descended into hell.
God was teaching his people – magical thinking doesn't work!
But the LORD God – he works salvation for his people –
he goes before them to fight against their enemies –
alone.)

But in our text for tonight – the LORD goes before his people at Jericho!
And on the seventh day they...

*and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they
marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the
trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.*

After six days of marching in silence

the time has come to shout!

And Joshua says:

¹⁷ And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. ^[b]

This language “devoted to destruction” is a special term in the OT
used for the entire destruction of something.

God commanded the complete and entire destruction of the Canaanites
as a picture of the final judgment.

Israel was to kill men, women, and children –
the entire eradication of the Canaanites –
as a reminder of what will happen to all those who rebel against God.

The Canaanites had known Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Some of them had blessed Abraham and his seed –
and those Canaanites will surely be found in the new creation!

But most of the Canaanites had refused to believe in the God of Abraham.
Even now, as we see in Rahab, those who repent and believe will be saved –
but those who continue in rebellion will be destroyed.

And just as our Lord Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead –
so also the lord Joshua came to judge the living –
as a foretaste of the final judgment.

At Jericho there was an extra step.

*All that is within it – not just the people, but also the animals –
shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction.*

This is the principle of the firstfruits.

In the first battle, don't take the plunder for yourself!
Don't even pretend to be pious and say
“we'll offer sacrifices with the best of the animals!” –
because in a sacrifice the worshipers eat the meat!

You say you are worshiping God – but really, it's all about you!

So at Jericho, Israel is called to destroy all living things.

All except Rahab:

Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.

In verse 18, Joshua warns the Israelites:

¹⁸ But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. ¹⁹ But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”

Joshua warns Israel that if they take of the devoted things,
they will bring the judgment of God upon the camp of Israel.

Don't be like the nations!

Remember that your God is holy!

And therefore all the holy things need to go into the treasury of the LORD.

If you take something that God has claimed for himself,

then you will bring trouble upon yourself and your people!

²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city.

And just like that Jericho fell!

And in verses 21-27 we see the outcome:

3. The Outcome (v21-27)

a. The Destruction of Jericho (v21)

²¹ Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

Every living thing was devoted to destruction.

The final judgment fell upon Jericho.

b. The Salvation of Rahab (v22-25)

²² But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, “Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.” ²³ So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel.

But Rahab is saved – together with her household – “all who belong to her.”

Anyone who wanted to be saved could have identified themselves with Rahab that day.

But then notice that in verse 23, they put her and her relatives “outside the camp of Israel.”

Why are they “outside the camp”?

Because they are uncircumcised.
They are unclean.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Israelites:

²⁴ And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

The final judgment has fallen upon Jericho –
and Jericho was utterly destroyed.

As we go through the conquest,
we will find that very few cities were utterly destroyed.
After all, God had promised them cities that they did not build,
vineyards that they did not plant...

If you destroy everything, then you can't use it!

Not surprisingly, we don't see much evidence of widespread destruction
in the archeological record!

But in the book of Joshua only two cities are burned with fire!
Jericho and Ai.
The rest of the cities were captured and inhabited!

So if the Bible tells the story truly,
then we should expect to find very little evidence for the conquest –
except, perhaps some cultural changes afterwards.

(and some archeologists have noted a remarkable decrease
in the number of pig bones in 13th century settlements –
and there are a few cases of mutilated statues of Canaanite deities –
which would also fit with the arrival of Yahweh-worshippers).

Verse 25 returns to Rahab:

²⁵ But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

We discover later that she married a man from Judah,
and her son was named Boaz.

In the book of Ruth we hear that Boaz had a special place in his heart

for outsiders who believed in the God of Abraham!
No doubt that was because of his mother, Rahab.

And so when Ruth the Moabitess came to Bethlehem,
Boaz saw something in her that reminded him of his mother!

Do you remember where the Moabites came from?
Moab was the son of Lot – by incest with one of his daughters –
in wake of the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah.

How ironic – and yet how fitting –
that the son of Jericho married the daughter of Sodom!

Because even as the fire of the LORD fell upon Sodom –
so also the fire of the LORD now fell upon Jericho –
and:

c. The Curse of Jericho (v26)

²⁶ *Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, “Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho.*

“At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.”

Joshua does not say that Jericho will never be rebuilt.
Rather, he says that the one who rebuilds Jericho will pay a terrible price!

We are told in 1 Kings, chapter 16,
that Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho –
at the cost of his eldest and youngest sons.

Many have speculated on what this means.
But if God wanted us to know, he would have told us!

What God *has* told us is that Hiel of Bethel did this in the days of King Ahab –
who “did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger
than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”

In *his days*, Hiel of Bethel built Jericho.

In other words, it was in the days of the worst king of Israel ever!
Ahab introduced Baal worship –
building a temple for Baal in Samaria!

And as if that was not bad enough,
he encouraged Hiel to incur the curse of God by rebuilding Jericho!

You need to take God seriously!
When he tells you how to walk,
you need to walk that way!
When he tells you not to go there –
don't go there!

And finally we see the result for Joshua:

d. The Fame of Joshua (v27)

²⁷ So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

What did Joshua actually *do* at the battle of Jericho?
He simply did what God told him to do!

He believed God – and so he did what God said.

I know that sometimes it seems hard – almost impossible –
to do what God says.

Sometimes, it may appear as though God's ways are foolish.
Marching around the city?
That's terrible strategy!
It leaves your army unprepared against a sudden counterstrike!

In the same way, sometimes the foolishness of preaching seems like a terrible strategy!
We need new techniques – new strategies – new ideas!!

But Jesus Christ is building his church!
And his fame continues to go forth in all the land!